DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 290 488 IR 052 259

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TITLE Professional Development Activities of Public Library Administrators: An Opinion Survey of the Relative Value of Such Activities.
PUB DATE Jun 87
NOTE 8p.; Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the American Library Association (San Francisco, CA, June 27-July 1, 1987).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Administrator Attitudes; Interprofessional Relationship; *Library Administration; Library Associations; Library Surveys; Professional Continuing Education; *Professional Development; *Public Libraries; Questionnaires; Seminars; State Surveys; Workshops
IDENTIFIERS *Florida

ABSTRACT

A survey of 104 Florida public library administrators resulted in a 70% response rate to a questionnaire investigating the value of a variety of types of activities associated with professional development. Presented as a poster session, this report indicates that the following professional and continuing education activities were considered the most beneficial in terms of investments of time, energy, and cost, to the survey respondents: (1) attending workshops, courses, or seminars; (2) reading professional library publications; (3) working with other librarians to learn or improve a skill; and (4) attending meetings of professional library associations. In response to an open-ended question asking for a description of one or two specific, most useful activities related to professional growth, 68% of the administrators indicated that participation in educational programs, such as workshops, seminars, or courses, was most productive from the standpoint of personal development. An appended table provides a quantitative description of survey results. (CGD)

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PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES OF PUBLIC LIBRARY ADMINISTRATORS: AN OPINION SURVEY OF THE RELATIVE VALUE OF SUCH ACTIVITIES

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ED290488

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ABSTRACT

A brief questionnaire was sent to a random sample of public library administrators; e.g. directors, assistant directors, department heads, program heads, and branch librarians. They were asked to rate, on a scale of 1 to 5, the value of a variety of types of activities in their own professional development.

The activity rated most highly by the group was attending workshops, courses, or seminars. The activity rated second highest was reading professional library publications. Two other types of activities also receiving high ratings were working with other librarians to learn a new skill or to improve a skill, and attending meetings of professional library associations.

The study also included an open-ended question in which respondents were asked to describe one or two particular activities which had been most useful to them in their development as professionals. A very large majority (68 percent) wrote that participation in some type of educational program -- workshop, seminar, or course -- had been most useful.

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STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Most librarians participate in a variety of types or professional development and continuing education activities. Such activities range from reading professional journals to attending expensive, intensive seminars on particular library-related problems. Do these activities have any real value, and, if so, are some types more valuable than others?

Participation in any such activities requires considerable time, energy, and sometimes significant amounts of money. Therefore, it is important that librarians carefully consider the relative value of the various types of activities available.

The individual librarian has little information available to help her/him decide which types of activities might be most useful. Very little research has been done on the topic. This exploratory study is an attempt to provide some information and ideas which may help some librarians when planning their own programs of professional development.

METHODOLOGY

A questionnaire was developed requesting public library administrators' opinions of the value of a variety of different types of activities which could assist them in their own profesisonal development. The questionnaire was sent to 104 librarians, a 20 percent random sample of the 520 librarians identified as having administrative or managerial responsibilities in Florida public libraries serving populations of 10,000 or more.

Respondents were asked to rate each of 8 different types of activities on a scale of 1 to 5. A rating of 1 would indicate that a respondent felt a particular type of activity had been extremely unimportant in his/her professional development. A rating of 5 would indicate the belief that a type of activity had been extremely important. A rating of 2, 3, or 4 would signify a respondent's opinion that the importance of an activity lay somewhere between the extremes indicated by 1 or 5. An open-ended question gave respondents an opportunity to describe one or two particular activities which had been most useful to them in their professional development.

A total of 73 questionnaires (70 percent of those mailed out) were returned. They were analyzed to determine the opinions of the group regarding the perceived value of the different types of activities.

FINDINGS

The activity rated most highly was attending workshops, courses or seminars. (See Table I) The activity rated second highest was reading professional library science publications. The table lists the 8 different types of activities and shows the percentage of respondents who rated each activity on the 1 to 5 scale.

The open-ended question seemed to confirm the group's opinion that participation in some type of workshop, course, or seminar was extremely valuable. Forty-five of the 66 respondents replying to the open-ended question indicated their opinion that participation in such programs had been the most useful type of activity in their professional development. No other type of activity was listed by more than 5 respondents.

CONCLUSIONS

A wide variety of activities which can contribute to professional development are available to most librarians. Participation in such activities requires time, energy, and often considerable money. Therefore, it is important that librarians carefully consider types of activities they will pursue. There is very little research to give guidance on the relative values of such experiences.

This exploratory study gives some evidence that participation in workshops, seminars, or courses may be more useful than a number of other activities. It also indicates that certain other activities, including professional reading, are potentially very useful.

Since this was just an exploratory study of one group of librarians, the findings must be considered with some caution. Further research is needed, for example, to discover whether other groups of librarians give similar responses.

TABLE I

Opinions of Different Types of Continuing Education Activities

Type of CEA	Extremely Unimportant 1	2	3	4	Extremely Important 5	No Answer	Total of High Ratings of 4 or 5
Attending workshops, courses, seminars	1 (1%)	1 (1%)	5 (7%)	32 (44%)	34 (47%)	0	66 (90%)
Reading library science publications	2 (3%)	4 (5%)	10 (14%)	22 (30%)	35 (48%)	0	57 (78%)
Working with other librarians	4 (5%)	2 (3%)	15 (21%)	27 (37%)	25 (34%)	0	52 (71%)
Attending meetings of professional library associations	4 (5%)	11 (15%)	16 (22%)	15 (21%)	26 (36%)	1	41 (57%)
Visits to observe other libraries	1 (1%)	12 (16%)	21 (29%)	20 (27%)	19 (26%)	0	39 (53%)
Reading publications of other professions	8 (11%)	15 (21%)	30 (41%)	17 (23%)	3 (4%)	0	20 (27%)
Attending meetings of other professions	15 (21%)	24 (33%)	26 (36%)	4 (5%)	4 (5%)	0	8 (11%)
Writing professional pieces for publication	37 (53%)	17 (24%)	12 (17%)	1 (1%)	3 (4%)	3	4 (5%)